

A Battle of Wits on Between English and Irish Secret Service

Cork, Ireland, March, 1920.
OCCASIONAL references are made in the daily newspapers from time to time to the Sinn Fein Secret Service and its triumphs, but few know of its inner works and the odds it has to face. In the fall of 1917 fifty of the leading members of the Self-Determination movement in Ireland were one night arrested by armed police and military in one big drive. The Sinn Feiners were astonished and made up their minds never to be caught unawares again. But how to counteract the government movement and know of a cabinet decision almost as soon as it was arrived at was the problem that confronted them.

A spy system was decided upon but to succeed where the Germans had failed with all their resources and money was no easy matter. It has been the proud boast of Britain that in the first six months of the war it mastered the German espionage movement and whacked it every inch of the way after that, but for over two years the Sinn Fein Secret Service men who are unpaid and just do the job for the love of the thing and for the freedom of their country, have been winning all the time. It's the Irish wit and readiness which does it for them. The success which attended their efforts provoked from an anti-Irish London evening paper the statement that "it makes one believe that walls have ears."

That was early in last December when at a quiet cabinet meeting in that quiet Downing Street in the heart of Westminster it was decided to round up 656 Sinn Feiners in Ireland.

The decision was sent in a code known only to a few of the high officials over the wire to Dublin Castle. But even before the authorities could have time to decipher the message all the Republican leaders had been put on their guard and had vanished. When the midnight raid of military came, out of the 656 people on the list for arrest only Alderman Thos. Kelly, of Dublin, was taken and even he had been warned, but his

By DENIS L. O'CONNELL

age and an illness prevented him from "going on the run." Three times late in December Dublin Castle was again ready for drives but cancelled at the last moment, knowing it was useless.

The government grew seriously alarmed at their secrets leaking out. General Sir Joseph Byrne—an army leader—who had command of the police force, was fired from his job at a moment's notice. Divisional chiefs who up to this had worked most conscientiously were "retired" from their posts. New men were introduced to stop the news getting out. Reforms were introduced everywhere and everything at last pointed to success.

Late in January the biggest drive ever tried in Ireland came off. The military alone were entrusted with its carrying out—fearing a leakage from the police side. At a moment's notice the stand to arms was given at four o'clock in the morning to the soldiers in barracks and in a flash they were off in their motor lorries for the swoop. But all the elaborate preparations were for nothing. The men who mattered and for whom the government would give a bushel of gold to catch had slipped off in the night and in the whole country of the many hundreds arrested only sixty-five were detained. Of these only four were of any consequence in the Sinn Fein movement.

Mr. Barton who is an M. P., had a commission in the British Army up to 1916 when he fought on the British side in the Dublin rebellion. Shortly afterward he resigned and threw himself in with the others who

were fighting for Irish freedom. He possesses a large estate in County Wicklow and was at the General Election made M. P. by an overwhelming majority. He was taken in a house in a search for another man. Joseph McGrath, M. P., who was ready to go, returned to say goodbye to his sick child and was captured with the infant in his arms. Two minutes and even one later he would have slipped out through the meshes of the government net.

There is certainly a master mind directing this staff of secret agents, some man who is able to piece the fragments of information that leak out and put them all together and then arrive at the right conclusion and with coolness and deliberation act at the right moment. Probably not six in the whole Republican movement know who he is; more than likely he passes through the streets of Dublin every day and it is hardly likely that he is ever seen in the political circles. At any rate the authorities, as well they may, have come to the conclusion that the Sinn Fein agent is everywhere, including the inside of Dublin Castle. But who these agents are is another thing. Espionage has never been brought home to a single person yet.

Irishmen all the world over know what a power the government's secret agents had in all times up to this. They know of the lavish awards that were offered for political information, but somehow awards are unavailing. In times gone by \$1,500 award was considered a big amount and generally brought results.

The cities of Ireland today are placarded with posters offering \$50,000 and farms in the Colonies with protection but nobody comes to claim. Some people say that the reason for the government's failure is that many of the "G" men of Dublin Castle have become imbued with the freedom spirit and have their hearts no longer in the job. At any rate it is unmistakably clear that the old fortress of ascendancy is not nearly so clever and astute as it used to be in the times of the Fenians.

Strike "Agin the Government" in Ireland

By HUGH CURRAN

Dublin, Ireland, March, 1920.
FOR the past months a strike of an exceptional kind has been in existence in the greater part of Ireland. It differs from the ordinary strike in that it is not an effort to improve wages or working conditions. It is a strike against a government order.

The following are the brief facts concerning what is known as the Irish motor permits strike: For a long time past there have been, as is well known, a series of outrages of various kinds including raids on aerodromes, raids on police barracks and such like, the object of which was to obtain arms. In many of these instances the raids were successful, the arms, ammunition and explosives being as a rule taken away in motor cars. The cars, although in the ordinary way licensed and numbered, had their numbers camouflaged or removed so that identification was impossible.

The Dublin Castle authorities were sorely perplexed. They knew that cars which were supposed to be under their control were being used in the perpetration of these outrages, and also that chauffeurs who were also licensed were taking active part in them. They could not catch the offenders and so some one in Dublin Castle hit upon the expedient of making an order that every driver of a motor car or lorry should have a special permit before he was allowed to take his vehicle out, that this permit should bear his photograph, and that each driver should sign an undertaking that his car would not be used for any unlawful purpose.

This order was instantly resented by the motor car drivers as an unwarranted interference with the liberty of the subject, more especially as it placed upon each one the responsibility of discriminating as to what was and what was not an unlawful purpose—an admittedly difficult matter to define in the present chaotic condition of affairs in Ireland. The Motor Drivers' union took action at once, and decided that its members should not take out the permits as required by the order, and when the date arrived for the operation of the order they went on strike.

The strike was instantly effective in Dublin and throughout the whole

south and west of Ireland. It has been extended to owners of cars who drive themselves and who do not employ chauffeurs, even doctors are not allowed to use their own autos.

During all this time not a single taxi was procurable and in consequence the old and rapidly disappearing horse cabs and jaunting cars have come back to the streets in increasing numbers and are now the only means of street locomotion excepting only the tramcar system.

Among the general public there has been a marked divergence of opinion as to the bona fide of this strike. A considerable body of opinion has not hesitated to

denounce the strike as utterly unjustified. They point out that the order affects only those who permit their cars to be used for criminal and lawless purposes, and that these were the people whom the government wanted to get at. If the order were accepted by the drivers it would undoubtedly have helped the police considerably. But the drivers' union on the other hand declined to allow its members to be used as helpers to the police, and so the decision was arrived at to request the withdrawal of the order or strike against it. The government did not withdraw it and the strike came. Among the general public it must be admitted that there is a good deal of sympathy with the drivers. Perhaps it is on the same principle that any body which is "agin the government" in Ireland is assured of a certain amount of popular sympathy; but there is also a business element which is opposed to the order.

At the Dublin Chamber of Commerce meeting one member demanded that the order should be withdrawn on the ground that it was disastrous to trade and commerce and was no earthly use in tracking down criminals. The same gentleman asserted that there would be no peace so long as they had a "competent military authority" doing the work of the police.

The strikers have carried out their work in a most thorough manner with the result that motor vehicles have almost entirely disappeared from the streets. Some venture-some people who thought they could disregard the strike found their cars attacked and damaged. Some who were known to have applied for permits had their garages entered and the vital parts of their cars removed. In the city of Waterford a firm of photographers who took out a permit had their car taken out of their garage and thrown bodily into the River Suir. The accompanying photograph shows the vehicle lying in the bed of the river at low tide.

Recently the government made a small concession with a view if possible to meet the men. They offered to modify the wording of the permit to read that the driver would not "knowingly" permit his car to be used for an illegal purpose, but this has been ineffective.



The picture shows what happened to the car of a Dublin photographer who took out an automobile driver's license while the Irish taxi drivers were on strike. The strikers held that the British government wanted them to register solely to keep track of the political activities.